



# Review of A. Barchiesi Homeric effects in Vergil's narrative

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Barchiesi, Alessandro. *Homeric effects in Vergil's narrative* (translated by Iliaria Marchesi and Matt Fox; first published 1984). Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015. xvi, 193 p. \$35.00. ISBN 9780691161815.

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Seems so long ago, as I thought upon being approached about reviewing a translation of Alessandro Barchiesi's (hereafter B.) *La traccia del modello*, the 1984 monograph based on B.'s 1978 Pisa honors thesis. There is also an Appendix, "The Lament of Juturna," originally in the thesis, but published separately in 1978 in the first issue of *Materiali e discussioni*, of which B. was one of the co-founders. Three of the other four chapters had also appeared before 1984, in other Italian journals. An Afterword by B. himself looks to survey "implications and loose ends" (115) of the book. A Foreword by Philip Hardie puts it all in the context of the golden age of "New Latin" of the 1980s and 1990s, something of a curiosity two decades after D. P. Fowler coined the term, referring to the struggle to bring postmodern Latin to Oxford and Cambridge. [[1]] Hardie well captures the precocious brilliance of B.'s book: "[i]t is astonishing to think that *La traccia* was based substantially on its author's honors thesis, the work of a brilliant scholar in his early twenties" (vii).

There are otherwise the four chapters of *La traccia*:

1. "The Death of Pallas. *Intertextuality and Transformation of the Epic Model*"
2. "The Structure of *Aeneid* 10"

3. "The Arms in the Sky. *Diffraction of a Narrative Theme*"

4. "The Death of Turnus. *Genre Model and Example Model*"

As Hardie noted, B. directs his enquiry mostly to "a limited number of passages in books 8, 10, and 12" (ix), but there is a wealth of material and plenty to think about in these most Iliadic books of the *Aeneid*.

B.'s aim was to explore through theoretically grounded criticism (Genette, et al., see p. 120) the Virgilian reception of the last third of the *Iliad*, to "differentiate the many possible meanings that coexist in our usual notion of a literary model" (xv). Like G. B. Conte, also at Pisa, B. concerned himself with how literary works function in relation to either a "modello-codice," "code model" (for B., and more usefully, "genre model" 69-93), or "modello-esemplare," "example model." Genre model has to do with the ways in which the receiving version may through the use of various formulae, motifs and topoi become legible as the very institution of epic poetry. Consideration of example model focuses on the appropriation and reformulation of specific source passages in Homer, and any number of other authors—though only the Homeric, the remit of the title, is here engaged. Issues of legibility, cultural and literary, come into play in productive ways, with e.g. good focus on reading via the Homeric scholia available and potent in Virgil's day.

*Homeric effects* is not always easy reading, its difficulty due both to a looseness or shifting variety and slight lack of clarity in theoretical terminology and to interpretive subjectivities that can call into question the

effectiveness of the theoretical foundation. The book is a product of its time (1970s and 1980s) and place, a “Pisan moment” (Hardie xi). Readers might best begin with the Afterword, finding there the traces of *La traccia* in B.’s own current thinking, so getting a sense of what still matters—with little guidance for what does not: (116) “I do not need to explain that I would write a different book today.” The Afterword treats the place of Homeric imitation in Virgilian studies, the reception of *La traccia*, with 122–25 providing a good starting place, and the ways Virgilian studies may usefully participate in the field of Homeric reception.

Sometimes things have a personal feel. On p. 121 B. laments the fact that without the early attention of D. Fowler, P. Hardie, D. Feeney, J. Farrell, and S. Hinds, “*La traccia* was bound to disappear without a trace, and it almost did” (121). S. J. Harrison is then singled out for failing in his 1991 *Aeneid* 10 commentary “to take on board my *Quellenforschung*” (121). Unmentioned however is Harrison’s review of *La traccia*, which closes positively: “as a literary treatment of Homeric allusion it . . . deserves the attention of scholars” (*JRS* 76 (1986) 321). Fowler only began his *Greece and Rome* subject reviews in 1986, so did not review B.’s book, leaving Harrison’s the only English assessment available until the early 1990s. By then Conte’s 1980 book *Il genere e i suoi confini*, along with the 1984 revision, had been translated into English.[[2]] B. had been acknowledged in the Italian versions, but little trace by 1986: “Conte and a small group of disciples and colleagues” (7). More substantively, reference to B.’s work

on the baldrick of Pallas (Conte 1980: 107 n. 12; 1984: 103-4 n. 12) has been altogether lost in translation.

*La traccia* was further noticed, in a refreshingly non-partisan survey of Virgilian intertextuality in the years before the New Latinists were being mustered. [[3]] Resisting the 1980s excesses around the “death of the author,” and allowing a degree of intentionality for the sake of argument, Farrell appreciated “the practical value of Conte and his school . . . without accepting the underpinnings of their approach” (23). For him “[t]he main value of Conte’s and Barchiesi’s work . . . lies in the careful, sensitive analysis of individual passages” (20). As S. Hinds was subsequently to argue in 1998, the code distinction can be destabilized, one person’s code model or “topos” easily becoming another’s example model. [[4]] By then *La traccia* had already become well enough known to have led to visiting professorships for B. at Harvard and Princeton.

Close reading of B. is always rewarding; *spatiis exclusus iniquis* I pick one or two examples: 7-14 treats Virgil’s reception of Homeric cultural codes and the way these codes are transformed and multiplied, with application to the Hercules-Jupiter exchange, so crucial to an understanding of the poem’s exploration of divine control and its relationship to the dictates of fate. Greek lyric and drama focus on the rarity of Heracles’ tears, so when Virgil has Hercules weep he produces an intensification in the sense of sorrow around the impending death of Pallas. Or at 29-32 B. writes engagingly on the Roman context for *servare modum* from Cato, Sallust, et al., connecting Virgil’s choices to details in the

Homeric scholia with their focus on moral/didactic issues. Thinking via the scholia is resumed in the Afterword, where at 126–28 B. rehabilitates Schlunk’s sometimes undervalued (including by B. as he admits) treatment of how Virgil, by insistently introducing the moon into his Nisus and Euryalus episode, engages the scholia’s asking how Odysseus and Diomedes could have seen in the dark of the *Doloneia*’s night.[[5]] Elsewhere gems are hidden away in footnotes. So 16–19 treat the ways Pallas’s fight is distinguished by “montage of fixed or formulaic elements” while “inserting strictly measured ‘subjective’ notes within the rigid lattice of epic narration.” Footnote 41 (from which Harrison’s commentary might have drawn) shows that this is so, partly helped by Knauer’s Homer citations.

There are details with which to take issue, as is to be expected with Virgilian criticism, these years on. Chapter 2, on the structure of *Aeneid* 10, is a good treatment of that book’s equal and unequal duels, with the deferred Aeneas-Turnus encounter just beneath the surface. One finds lacking here the ideological nuance that would emerge in the following decades, particularly in the work of Sergio Casali, Leah Kronenberg, Oliver Lyne and James O’Hara. Rather, on p. 41 the stronger of the two protagonists are juxtaposed, to the detriment of Turnus, who “wishes that Evander were there to witness his own son’s death (443),” while Aeneas “is touched by filial love for Lausus (*fallit te incautum pietas tua* 812).” These words, uttered just before the killing, rather draw attention to the fact that Lausus has been deceived into rashness by *his* filial love for his father Mezentius, throwing into crisis the very nature of

*pietas* itself, when physical inequality is in play. Absent from B.'s book is any recognition that Virgil brings Lausus' mother (her only role in the poem) onto the stage, as Aeneas drives his mighty sword into the body of Lausus "through the tunic that his mother had woven from soft gold." (*tunicam molli mater quam neverat auro* 818). This detail is pure Virgilian invention, without genre or example model, thwarting easy conclusions about the relative humanity of violence in *Aeneid* 10.

With similar prejudice, at 15-25 and again on 50-51, B. treats Turnus' despoiling Pallas' baldric (*Aeneid* 10.495-505), as he puts his foot on Pallas' body. While critics adduce *Iliad* 16.503-4 and 862-63, B. well notes the "optical illusion" involved, since in the Homeric passages no despoiling happens (rather, foot used to extract weapon). Thus what had been taken as a "neutral repetition of the epic code" in fact amounts to the code's univocal fixity being "thrown into crisis", since the gestures (trampling and despoiling) are "foreign to the iconic typology of Homeric tradition" (18-19). Turnus also acts beyond the pale since in Virgil's day trampling of the enemy corpse is said to be a transgression of Roman cultural practice.

The basis for these claims may be challenged. On the cultural code the only textual example invoked is Plutarch *Flamininus* 21.2 where Scipio is praised for "not trampling the fortunes of Hannibal." Fortunes are distinct from bodies. Moreover, Plutarch's comment surely implies that most Romans would have trampled away; that Scipio did not is what distinguishes him. As for the epic code—trampling and despoiling not evidenced—in n. 43 B. finds

that *Iliad* 13.618 (context not identified) “is unique in the Homeric typology and has no stylistic analogies.” B. needs this version of philological fundamentalism, as Hinds put it (1998: 17–51), in order to protect the crisis of codes that he sees in Pallas’ (uncoded) trampling-despoiling. But if a reader looks up the passage in the footnote, *Iliad* 13.618 may come to life as example model, allusion or reference, full of meaning. The warrior in question is Menelaus, who kills, tramples, and despoils Pisander, then talks of the Trojan theft of his wife Helen and breach of hospitality involved. It is not difficult to activate Turnus’ belief that *his* “wife” Lavinia has been stolen by Aeneas (*ille Paris* for Iarbas at *Aeneid* 4.215), further to note that at *Iliad* 13.660, after the end of Menelaus’ *aristeia*, Paris gets angry, as does Aeneas following the death of Pallas—each case occasioned by breached *xenia/hospitium*. In that case what was claimed as a non-analogy becomes a potent “Model of Menelaus” example model intruder, highly and subversively interpretable.

Indeed the strongest pages of *Homeric effects* make precisely this move. In “The Death of Turnus” (Ch. 4) B. treats the end of the *Aeneid* primarily through the Homeric “Slaying of Hector” “example model.” B.’s observation that appeals to mercy never work in the *Iliad* leads to invocation of “the only episode in the entire poem where the supplication of an enemy is *heeded*” (86), the “model of Priam” intruding into the “Slaying of Hector” model. The reader who recognizes the reference to *Iliad* 24 (already available in Conington, and in Knauer’s wordlist[[6]]) perhaps expects a similar



*clementia* from Aeneas, but is disappointed as *ultio* wins out over *misericordia*. There is much to be learned from *Homeric effects*, also much, including the theoretical scheme, that first-time readers of the English version may want to qualify and update.

[[1]] Cf. the eclectic catalogue at *Arachnion*, 2: 1995 at <http://www.cisi.unito.it/arachne/num2/fowler.html>.

[[2]] C.P. Segal, *The Rhetoric of Imitation*. Ithaca 1986.

[[3]] J. Farrell, *Vergil's Georgics and the Traditions of Ancient Epic*. Oxford and New York 1991.

[[4]] S. Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext*. Cambridge 1998: 41-43.

[[5]] R. R. Schlunk, *The Homeric Scholia and the Aeneid*. Ann Arbor 1974: 71-74.

[[6]] G. N. Knauer, *Die Aeneis un Homer*, Göttingen 1964: 431.